

Seattle Parks and Recreation

University District Northwest Park Plan

Review Draft: July 20, 2005

Executive Summary

The University District, officially designated as the University District Northwest in Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, is an emerging urban center expected to experience high residential and employment growth during the next 20 years. Bordering on the University of Washington (UW) and encompassing several small residential areas, an active business district, and Safeco's corporate campus, the University District has a unique and diverse set of park, open space, and recreational needs. While the community features a few excellent parks and the nearby UW includes attractive passive open space, the University District's 2.86 acres of open space falls 2.97 acres below the open space standards in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The projected increases of 2,000 new households and 2,640 jobs by 2024 mean that this deficit will grow to 5.27 acres unless additional assets can be provided.

Working with local stakeholders in two work sessions, the following priorities for new park facilities were identified:

- 1. Highest Priority:** A centrally located park, approximately one-half acre in size, that can accommodate a variety of uses to be identified during park design, and that is located in a high-volume pedestrian area with current or projected multi-family mixed-use buildings.
- 2. Highest Priority:** A number of smaller plazas in high-volume pedestrian areas. If possible, these should be coordinated with adjacent development and need not all be provided through Department of Parks & Recreation (Parks) acquisition.
- 3. High Priority:** Smaller neighborhood-oriented parks (approximately one-quarter acre in size) to serve local needs. The type of needs will vary depending on the locale.

To meet these needs, this plan proposes a concept plan emphasizing the following elements:

- **Work collaboratively with property owners of major parcels in the vicinity of Brooklyn Avenue between NE 43rd and NE 47th Streets to develop a central multi-use park.**

Work session participants noted that this subarea will be intensively re-developed (especially with the Safeco campus expansion), is centrally located, and is sited conveniently near the future light rail station, making it an ideal location for the community's focal open space. Creation of a park here will likely require a partnership in which the park is constructed in conjunction with private development. Such an arrangement might have considerable advantages if the activities are all compatible and would help ensure that a new park is actively and appropriately used.

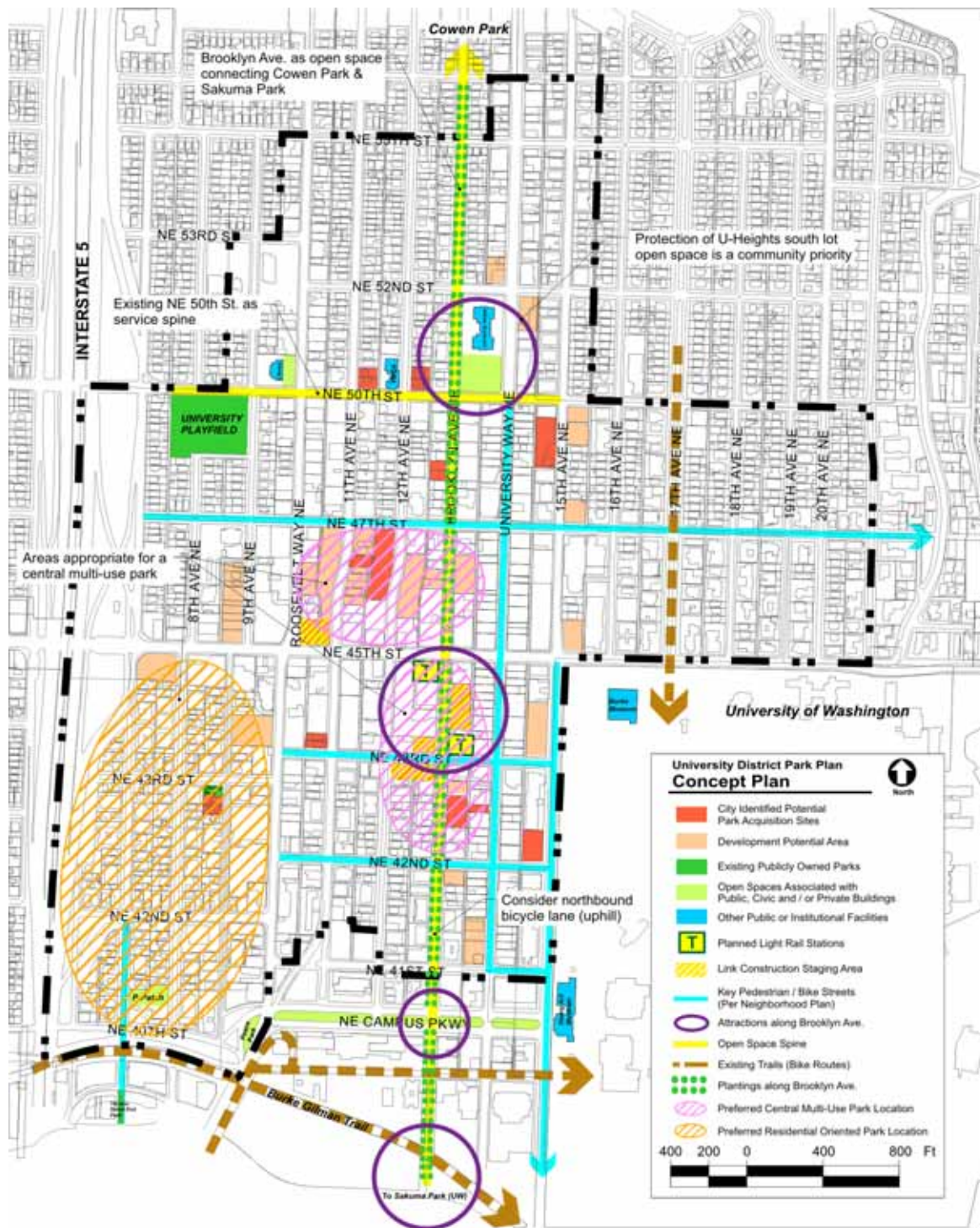


Figure 1. Concept plan for the University District

- **Protect and enhance the South Lot of the University Heights Center as public open space.**

Both the University Community Urban Center Plan and participants in the stakeholder work sessions stressed the importance of this community resource. Seattle Public School District #1 currently owns the entire site and leases it to the University Heights Center for the Community (UHCC). The UHCC uses the South Lot for weekday parking to help support its activities, so that Parks acquisition would encompass two challenges: persuading the School District to sell a portion of the site and convincing the UHCC to forego parking on the South

Lot. Nonetheless, Parks acquisition of the South Lot could help the UHCC secure the balance of the site and thus help ensure the preservation of the landmark school building.

- **Add to Christie Park or create another small park in the area south of NE 45th Street and west of Roosevelt Avenue NE.**

Parks should seek to expand Christie Park at 9th NE and NE 43rd Street by acquiring the two properties immediately to the south. While this park expansion would primarily serve a localized need and is not as critical as new and more centralized multi-use open spaces, there is a significant residential population in this subarea and additional park space is warranted.

- **Upgrade Brooklyn Avenue NE to create a pedestrian corridor.**

Stakeholder workshop participants noted that Brooklyn Avenue between Cowen Park and Sakuma Viewpoint is a primary corridor for neighborhood activity. The street is wider than necessary for its current two lanes of traffic and could be dramatically improved to link parks and neighborhood facilities

- **Encourage the development of small and attractive urban plazas and pocket open spaces through design review and incentives.**

Given the current shortage of open space in the community and recent City actions to increase population and density, such spaces will be at a premium. Workshop participants gave this issue a high priority and noted that the design review process would be an appropriate vehicle for securing ground-level open space available to the general public in lieu of a greater amount of rooftop gardens or other project-related space available only to project residents.

- **Partner with the University of Washington to provide new open spaces in conjunction with Southwest Campus development.**

The University of Washington has provided open space, such as Sakuma Viewpoint, that is very attractive to local residents and the general public. As new buildings are constructed in the Southwest Campus, there may be the opportunity to develop some new open space useful to the needs of the campus and the community. In fact, such open space might serve as the binder that better integrates “town and gown.”

- **Maintain and protect existing open space resources, including University Playfield, Campus Parkway, the 7th Avenue NE p-patch, Peace Park, Sakuma Viewpoint, and the green in front of the City’s University Branch Library.**

All of these open spaces are important resources for the community, without regard to ownership, and several have been enhanced through community efforts. The artwork on Campus Parkway, the intensive gardening at the p-patch, and the new gateway at University Playfield attest to the fondness community members feel toward existing open spaces, and the new Northlake Park currently under development at the 7th Avenue NE street end will add another small focal point.

To implement these general directions, the plan recommends the following actions.

1. Acquire a significant open space parcel.

Parks has funds from the Pro Parks Levy and supplementary Conservation Futures funding to acquire a site for a new park in the University District. Based on the analysis of this study and the recommendations of the University Community Urban Center Plan, the top priority should be for a centrally located site sufficient to accommodate a range of activities.

Given a number of constraints, five site acquisition/joint development opportunities stand out for special consideration. It is recommended that, during the second half of 2005, Parks explore acquisition of the following sites in order of priority (with a partnership with the University District Parking Association (UDPA) being highest priority). This plan's Appendix includes guidelines intended to help Parks' staff in site evaluation and development.

- UDPA Lot Between NE 45th Street, 12th Avenue NE, NE 47th Street, and 11th Avenue NE.
- University Heights Center South Lot.
- Northeast or Northwest Corner of NE 43rd Street and Brooklyn Avenue NE.
- Two Residential Lots South of Christie Park (9th Avenue NE south of NE 43rd Street).
- Southwest Corner of NE 43rd Street and Brooklyn Avenue NE.

2. Participate in the preparation of a street improvement plan for Brooklyn Avenue NE.

Brooklyn Avenue NE's route, connecting several community attractions and future developments, makes it an important street improvement opportunity. A streetscape plan would also allow the City to upgrade Brooklyn over time as a series of small projects or portions of larger engineering system upgrades. This is especially true since Brooklyn Avenue NE will be the center of the Safeco campus, is an important connector in the UW's Southwest Campus, and is a potential site for the LINK light rail station. While the leadership of this plan might fall to the City's Department of Planning and Development or its Department of Transportation, Parks should be an active participant and, perhaps, initiate the effort.

3. Continue to participate in the City's design review process to ensure that open space and streetscape improvements provided as part of new development are consistent with the community's objectives and this plan.

The design guidelines in the Appendix provide a tool for the evaluation of project proposals. Participants in the stakeholder work sessions emphasized the need for small plazas and open space to be provided as part of new development. This emphasis should be communicated to the local Design Review Board and considered in project review.

4. Participate in the City's current regulatory efforts that provide parks funding in conjunction with private development activity.

The fee-in-lieu program and impact fees that are being considered for the Center City may be appropriate in the University District, especially if the project-level "open space" requirement in the current zoning code is reduced.